

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, GE, US

SUBJECT: VISIT OF GDR FOREIGN MINISTER FISCHER:
MEETINGS WITH CONGRESSMEN

1. DURING THE COURSE OF HIS JUNE 6 VISIT, FISCHER
MET SEPARATELY WITH MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS COMMITTEE AND MEMBERS OF THE SENATE FOREIGN
RELATIONS COMMITTEE AND HELD A SEPARATE SESSION WITH
CONGRESSMAN BINGHAM, AND RABBI MILLER AND BEN FERENCZ
OF THE CONFERENCE ON JEWISH MATERIAL CLAIMS. IN BOTH
OF THE LARGER MEETINGS FISCHER WAS QUESTIONED
INTENSIVELY ON JEWISH CLAIMS, DIVIDED FAMILIES AND
GDR INVOLVEMENT IN AFRICA. HE WAS EXPOSED, PARTICULARLY
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DURING THE MEETING WITH THE SFRC, TO RATHER STRONG
AND NEGATIVE OPINIONS ABOUT THE GDR AND, AFTER THE
SFRC MEETING, APPEARED CHASTENED.

2. THE MEETING WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE HIRC TOOK
PLACE IN THE CAPITOL BUILDING AT 9 A.M. AND WAS
ATTENDED BY BINGHAM (D-NY), SOLARZ (D-NY), HAMILTON (D-IN),

FINLEY (R-IL), ZABLOCKI (D-WN) AND TWO OR THREE OTHERS. FISCHER OPENED THE MEETING WITH A TWENTY-MINUTE MONOLOGUE FOCUSSED ON THE NEED FOR IMPROVING US/GDR RELATIONS, SPECIFICALLY IN THE TRADE AND CULTURAL AREAS. HE PLUMPED SPECIFICALLY FOR A CULTURAL AGREEMENT AND THE DROPPING OF TRADE "BARRIERS." CONGRESSMAN HAMILTON, WHO CHAIRED THE MEETING, THEN OPENED THE FLOOR TO QUESTIONS FROM HIS COLLEAGUES. FINLEY STARTED OFF BY ASKING FISCHER WHEN THE GDR MIGHT FEEL SECURE ENOUGH TO REDUCE THE FORTIFICATIONS ON ITS BORDERS. FISCHER REPLIED THAT WHAT FOR FINLEY WAS "DISCOMFORTING" WAS FOR HIM "COMFORTING." HE THEN LAUNCHED INTO A TEN-MINUTE DISSERTATION ON THE ROLE OF THE GDR/FRG BORDER COMMISSION IN DEMARCATING THE GDR'S 1381 KILOMETERS OF BORDER, ONLY 92 KILOMETERS OF WHICH REMAINED IN DISPUTE. THOSE 92 KILOMETERS, HE ADDED, WERE ON THE ELBE AND ARE THE OBJECT OF A DISPUTE AS TO WHETHER THE BORDER SHOULD BE ON THE EASTERN SHORE OR IN THE MIDDLE.

3. CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ, NOTING THAT HE REPRESENTED THE LARGEST JEWISH DISTRICT IN THE U.S., THEN ASKED FISCHER A TWO-PART QUESTION, THE FIRST OF WHICH CONCERNED GDR INTENTIONS VIS-A-VIS THE JEWISH VICTIMS OF NAZISM AND THE SECOND PART OF WHICH CONCERNED THE CONFIDENTIAL

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POSSIBILITY OF THE EVENTUAL REUNIFICATION OF GERMANY. ADDRESSING THE JEWISH CLAIM ISSUE, FISCHER SAID THAT THE GDR HAD DISCHARGED ALL ITS RESPONSIBILITIES WITH REGARD TO REPARATIONS (WIEDERGUTMACHUNG) THROUGH ITS PAYMENTS TO THE "EASTERN CIRCLE OF REPARATIONS" AS "REQUIRED BY THE POTSDAM AGREEMENT." HE CHARACTERIZED THE GDR AS A TOTALLY NEW STATE WHICH HAD "ROOTED OUT FASCISM" AND DESCRIBED THE GDR'S METHODS OF COMPENSATING THE NAZI PERSECUTEES IN THE GDR, BEING CAREFUL TO POINT OUT THAT HIS FATHER WAS AMONG THE LATTER. FISCHER THEN STATED THAT THE GDR, HOWEVER, UNDERSTOOD THE EMOTION ON THIS ISSUE AND HAD, THEREFORE, OFFERED 1 MILLION DOLLARS AS A HUMANITARIAN GESTURE TO THE CONFERENCE ON JEWISH MATERIAL CLAIMS, AN OFFER WHICH WAS REFUSED. THE GDR HE CONCLUDED DOES NOT HAVE A FUND FROM WHICH IT CAN LIGHTLY DISPENSE "GIFTS." TURNING TO THE POSSIBLE REUNIFICATION OF GERMANY, FISCHER DISMISSED THAT POSSIBILITY, SAYING IT WAS LIKE MIXING WATER WITH FIRE. SUCH A TASK, HE SAID, WAS IMPOSSIBLE, RESULTING IN "HOT STEAM," WHICH, AS WE KNOW, "IS A DANGEROUS THING."

4. AT THE END OF THE MEETING WITH HIRC MEMBERS, FISCHER WAS ESCORTED BY CONGRESSMAN BINGHAM TO AN ANTE-ROOM FOR A PRIVATE MEETING WITH RABBI ISRAEL MILLER AND BEN FERENCZ OF THE CONFERENCE ON JEWISH MATERIAL CLAIMS. FISCHER HAD BEEN MADE AWARE EARLIER THAT MILLER AND FERENCZ WOULD SIT IN ON THE MEETING AND THAT THEY HAD UNDERTAKEN TO KEEP THE FACT THAT SUCH A MEETING TOOK PLACE CONFIDENTIAL. ACCORDING TO FERENCZ, HE AND RABBI MILLER RAISED THE POSSIBILITY OF THE GDR'S PAYING REPARATIONS TO THE JEWISH VICTIMS OF NAZISM, AT LEAST IN PART, IN MFN-TREATED GOODS. FISCHER REPORTEDLY PROMISED TO CONSIDER THE PROPOSAL WHEN HE GOT BACK TO BERLIN AND TO ADVISE CONFIDENTIAL

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FERENCZ THROUGH AMBASSADOR BOLEN WHEN FERENCZ MIGHT MEET AGAIN WITH FUNKE OF THE ANTI-FASCIST LEAGUE. THE VERY FACT THAT FISCHER AGREED TO MEET WITH RABBI MILLER AND BEN FERENCZ WAS A DEPARTURE FROM PREVIOUS GDR POLICY AND MUST BE REGARDED AS A POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT.

5. THE AFTERNOON SESSION WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE SFRC WAS CHAIRED BY SENATOR CHURCH (D-ID); AND ATTENDED BY SENATORS JAVITS (R-NY), CRANSTON (D-CA), AND INOUE (D-HA). SENATOR JAVITS QUICKLY BORED IN ON THE QUESTIONS OF JEWISH CLAIMS AND DIVIDED FAMILIES. HOLDING A LETTER FROM SENATOR MORGAN, JAVITS SAID THAT HE SPECIFICALLY WANTED TO RAISE THE CASE OF GERHARD WILHELMI, WHOM HE SAID HAD BEEN IMPRISONED IN THE GDR FOR WANTING TO EMIGRATE AND FOR "ALLEGEDLY BREAKING SOME UNDEFINED GDR LAW." FISCHER REPLIED THAT HE WAS SURE THAT WILHELMI WAS IN JAIL NOT BECAUSE HE WANTED TO VISIT RELATIVES BUT FOR SOME CRIME. HE SAID THERE COULD BE NO QUESTION OF AN INJUSTICE IF WILHELMI WAS, IN FACT, IN JAIL. JAVITS BROKE IN TO SAY THAT HE HAD USED THE WORD "ALLEGEDLY" ADVISEDLY. HE HAD BEEN, HE SAID, IN SEVERAL COUNTRIES WITH DIFFERENT SYSTEMS OF JURISPRUDENCE INCLUDING THOSE OF EASTERN EUROPE AND HAD UNFORTUNATELY COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT INDEED INJUSTICES SOMETIMES OCCURRED. NOTING THAT HE WAS NOT A CONSULAR OFFICER AND RULING OUT AN INJUSTICE, FISCHER SAID HE WOULD LOOK INTO THE CASE PERSONALLY. SENATOR CHURCH THEN THANKED FISCHER FOR HIS WILLINGNESS TO INVESTIGATE THE MATTER AND SAID HE WOULD APPRECIATE A REPORT DIRECTLY TO THE COMMITTEE. FISCHER PROMISED TO DO CONFIDENTIAL

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SO THROUGH AMBASSADOR SIEBER.

6. TURNING AGAIN TO JEWISH CLAIMS, JAVITS ASKED FISCHER WHAT HE WAS GOING TO DO ABOUT THE MATTER. FISCHER REPLIED ESSENTIALLY ALONG THE LINES HE HAD MADE EARLIER TO THE HIRC, CONCLUDING WITH A REMINDER TO JAVITS THAT THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REPARATIONS (WIEDERGUTMACHUNG) AND PROPERTY CLAIMS (VERMOGUNGSRRECHT). WITH SOME EMOTION, JAVITS SAID THAT, AS A LAWYER, HE VERY WELL KNEW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REPARATIONS AND PROPERTY CLAIMS.

"WE ARE NOT KIDS," HE TOLD FISCHER. "YOU ARE HERE TO GAUGE THE OPINION OF CONGRESS, AND I AM TELLING YOU WHAT THAT OPINION IS. YOU MUST ADDRESS THIS ISSUE AND SOLVE IT, OR THERE WILL BE NO FURTHER MOVEMENT IN OUR RELATIONS." JAVITS WAS STRONGLY SECONDED IN THIS BY SENATOR CRANSTON. SENATOR CHURCH THEN TURNED TO FISCHER AND SAID, "MR. MINISTER, YOU HAVE JUST HEARD FROM THE TWO LARGEST AMERICAN STATES ON THIS SUBJECT. I HOPE THAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS."

7. SENATOR CRANSTON THEN ASKED FISCHER ABOUT GDR ACTIVITIES IN ZAIRE--ACTIVITIES WHICH FISCHER FIRMLY DENIED ALONG THE LINES OF HIS PRESENTATION TO THE SECRETARY EARLIER IN THE DAY. IN A CURIOUS ASIDE, FISCHER SAID "THE OTRAG MISSILEFIRM WHICH IS LAUNCHING ROCKETS FROM THE MIDDLE OF SHABA DOES NOT HAVE ITS HOME OFFICE IN THE GDR."

8. SENATOR CHURCH ASKED FISCHER ABOUT THE NATIONALITY ISSUE THAT WAS BLOCKING A CONSULAR CONVENTION, ADDING THAT IT WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT TO PROCEED VERY FAR IN OUR RELATIONS WITHOUT A CONSULAR CONVENTION. FISCHER SAID THAT THE HEART OF THE ISSUE WAS ARTICLE
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116 OF THE FRG BASIC LAW, ACCORDING TO WHICH, HE SAID, "THE GDR FOREIGN MINISTER IS A FRG CITIZEN." HE SAID IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE GDR TO ACCEPT SUCH A PROPOSITION AND THAT THAT WAS WHAT THE U.S. WAS ASKING THE GDR TO DO. HE ALSO TOLD THE SENATORS THAT THERE WAS PRECEDENT FOR INCLUDING A NATIONALITY CLAUSE IN A BILATERAL CONVENTION WITH THE U.S., SINCE

THERE WERE SUCH CLAUSES IN THE US-UK AND US-JAPAN CONVENTIONS. THE QUESTION OF A CULTURAL AGREEMENT AND TRADE RELATIONS WERE ALSO TOUCHED UPON PERIPHERALLY IN THE MEETING.

9. THE INTENSITY OF NEGATIVE FEELINGS EXPRESSED IN THESE CONGRESSIONAL MEETINGS WAS PROBABLY NOT EXPECTED BY FISCHER WHO APPEARED VISIBLY SHAKEN BY THE END OF THE DAY. IN THIS REGARD THE MEETINGS WERE PROBABLY A VERY USEFUL EDUCATION ABOUT CONGRESSIONAL CLIMATE FOR THE GDR.

10. FOR BONN: US BONN GROUP REPRESENTATIVE MAY DRAW ON ABOVE IN BRIEFING BONN GROUP. VANCE

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